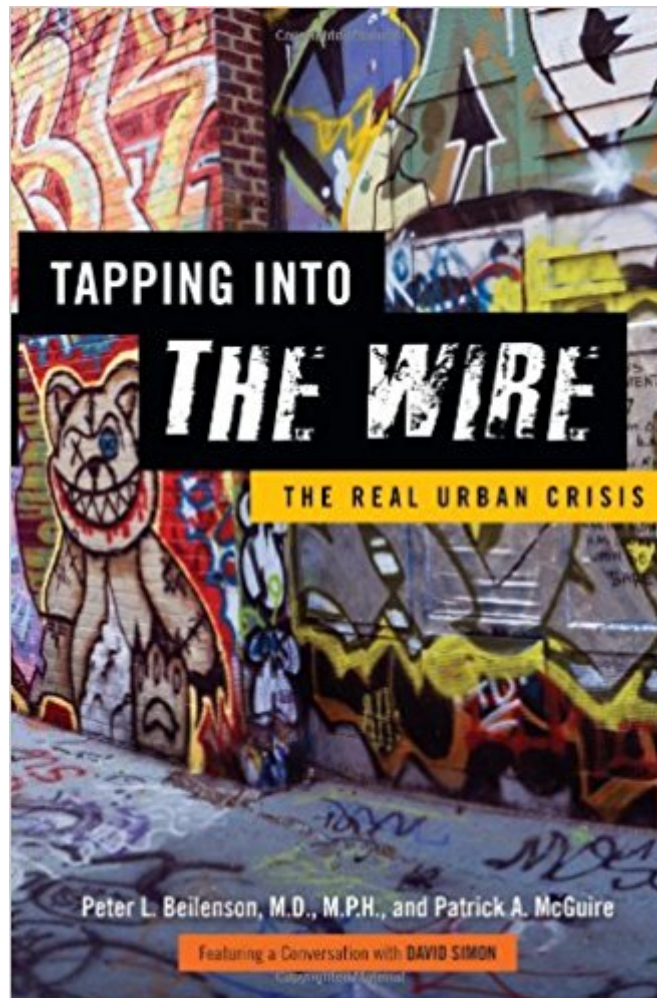




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Tapping Into The Wire: The Real Urban Crisis



Synopsis

Did Omar Little die of lead poisoning? Would a decriminalization strategy like the one in Amsterdam end the War on Drugs? What will it take to save neglected kids like Wallace and Dukie? Tapping into 'The Wire' uses the acclaimed television series as a road map for exploring connections between inner-city poverty and drug-related violence. Past Baltimore City health commissioner Peter Beilenson teams up with former Baltimore Sun reporter Patrick A. McGuire to deliver a compelling, highly readable examination of urban policy and public health issues affecting cities across the nation. Each chapter recounts scenes from episodes of the HBO series, placing the characters' challenges into the broader context of public policy. A candid interview with the show's co-creator David Simon reveals that one of the intentions of the series is to expose gross failures of public institutions, including criminal justice, education, labor, the news media, and city government. Even if readers haven't seen the series, the book's detailed summaries of scenes and characters brings them up to speed and engages them in both the story and the issues. With a firm grasp on the hard truths of real-world problems, Tapping into 'The Wire' helps undo misconceptions and encourage a dialogue of understanding.

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Customer Reviews

"An engaging, fast-paced read that translates the fiction of a cable one-hour drama to the reality of an American City. Using the themes of the social determinants of health, governance, and intersectoral action, the book seeks to reframe the discourse about drug policy and the health of US

cities. It is an important read for students and for those seeking to communicate the importance of social determinants of health and understand the politics of drugs and health in cities." (Danielle C. Ompad *Journal of Urban Health*) "A convincing argument that nonviolent drug users are part of a significant public health problem that demands an effective response from cities... Readers cannot help but feel sympathy for those who struggle with addiction and the plight of government officials who strive to create alternatives to this dilemma. Highly recommended for readers interested in substance abuse or criminal justice issues and prepared for intellectual engagement." (Library Journal) "Living in Baltimore for most of the five years that I filmed *The Wire*, I was astounded to see how closely life mirrors art for too many residents of this—and most other—major cities in America. I hope the readers of this intriguing book really 'feel' the problems that are highlighted and emerge committed to change." (Michael Kenneth Williams, actor, *The Wire*) "A must-read and a great read to understand why drug abuse undermines all our lives and to learn effective and less costly ways to solve the complex riddle of poverty and drug abuse. We need such evidence-based public health analyses and leadership to strengthen our cities' futures and support a resilient, successful, and equitable nation. This book offers a cogent, 21st-century public health agenda to create urban health and well-being." (Linda P. Fried, M.D., M.P.H, Dean, Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University) "This book will help both fans and critics of *The Wire* make connections between the stories presented on screen and how public health approaches can address vexing and seemingly intractable social problems." (John A. Rich, M.D., M.P.H., author of *Wrong Place, Wrong Time: Trauma and Violence in the Lives of Young Black Men*) "Beilenson leads us through the rationale and implementation of public health initiatives that might have an effect on the show's characters, or on the city's embattled residents those characters are meant to portray." (Andrew Cleary *Rain Taxi Review of Books*)

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Very easy read, hard to stop when one gets started. Perhaps I read it for the sake of the "Confirmation effect" or something like that but the book outlines numerous out of the box ideas used to combat teen pregnancy, drug abuse, gun violence, etc. If people would just get over their personal dogmas and beliefs that what was right/understood/believed in 1984 or some earlier year was and is always the right thing to do/approach to a problem the citizens of the USA would be a lot better off. In the words of that famous economist "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do sir"/Pick this up and read it. You'll learn a lot.

I read this for a writing class where we talked about the show. Interesting read.

I was raised in New York City and was a huge fan of *The Wire*. I am not a resident of Maryland and a graduate student at The University of Maryland School of Social Work. This book was a great resource in understanding national issues through a local lens and a great history lesson. I would recommend it to anyone.

Extremely informative book. I would recommend it anyone in a public job. Now I have to check out the DVD.

Insightful.

As a serious fan of The Wire series (HBO TV show which ran for five years starting in 2002) and a layperson interested in the issues alluded to in this show, I eagerly looked forward to reading this book. As in many things, the reality fell short of the expectation. Before I go further, let me explain that a good deal of The Wire's allure is that many characters have well defined arcs and those arcs are all resolved in ways which the viewer would agree are both plausible and unexpected. This book, over and over, exposes those resolutions which would seriously damage the pleasure someone would get from viewing The Wire series. Since The Wire is still a hot DVD seller and available in places such as Netflix, this isn't a trivial issue. The book covers the urban issues the series does with a heavy dose given to the illegal drug trade and its consequences. Both authors are familiar with the problems one having served as a the head of the city's department of health and the other writing for The Sun. A good deal of the book is written by the doctor in the first person which gives a sense of him not only bragging about what he did, but he allows for no points of view except his own dogmatic ones. He does not extend the discussion further than a very narrow view. For example, he states that drug addiction in about 1950 Baltimore was a trivial problem but by the mid 60's it was growing like mad and by the time of The Wire, it was a wildfire consuming the city. However he doesn't even expend a syllable on why this rise in drug use. After all, the stuff (heroin mostly) existed in 1950 as well. He also confuses cause and effect. For example, he moans loud and long that the corner stores where inner city folks buy their food fail to stock fresh fruits and vegetables, but ignores that these merchants are hardly stupid and if this sort of merchandise would sell ahead of Ding Dongs, the merchants would stock it. His chapter on firearms may as well have been lifted en mass from Handgun Control, Inc.'s pamphlets. If you believe the author on this one, firearms often, on their own, go on rampages and kill innocent folks who are wishing only to use them for defense. In another chapter, he mocks and sneers at those who say converting our medical system into a single payer such as places like Sweden have, is socialistic. What else is it if not socialistic to nationalize about 15% of the economy? What could possibly be the source of his sneering dismissal except he didn't get it done which he wanted. Again, he sees in black and white - you are either with him and his ideas or you are a fool who deserves nothing but dismissal. The book is good as a chronicle of what one man did to improve the public health of Baltimore and the problems he faced in bringing this improvement about, but his one sided rants where only he had the right of things grow very tiresome. Ironically too, the narrative would entice many to buy or rent the DVD's of The Wire, but the book's contents would ruin 75% of the stories in the series. Conditionally recommended.

This is an interesting companion to the television show *The Wire* which was set in Baltimore, MD in the worst neighborhoods. I found that the discussion of concerns about the poverty in the streets and across urban America are important. I was glad someone was looking into them and focusing on them. I would love to find out more about public policy on drug abuse, poverty, etc. I am an educator and found many misconceptions about education in *The Wire* and in *Treme*. They seemed to be based on common stereotypes of education and urban education but a complete lack of knowledge of education laws, research and especially special education law. So with that in mind, I would need to know more than just take up what David Simon and *The Wire* had to say about public policy. Sometimes it's based on hearsay and "what everybody knows" and not enough on what research really says. It can be important because stereotypes can be repeated again and again without enlightenment.

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